

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

OMB-01 /062 W

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P R 281240Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2617

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MY

SUBJECT: KELANTAN ELECTIONS

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 1460 DTG 1706167 FEB 78

B) KUALA LUMPUR 1299 DTG 130930Z FEB 78

1. SUMMARY: NOMINATIONS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED AND ELECTION-
EERING IS IN FULL SWING FOR IMPORTANT KELANTAN STATE
ELECTIONS MARCH 11. AT THIS JUNCTURE OBSERVERS RATE THE
CONTEST A TOSS UP, WITH THE ADVENT OF A REFORMIST OFF-
SHOOT OF THE OPPOSITION ISLAMIC PARTY (PAS) ADDING AN
ADDITIONAL ELEMENT OF UNCERTAINTY TO THE EQUATION. AS
HEAD OF THE NATIONAL FRONT CAMPAIGN, FINANCE MINISTER
RAZALEIGH HAMZAH IS LAYING HIS POLITICAL FORTUNES ON THE
LINE IN HOPES OF SECURING A POWER BASE TO FURTHER HIS
PRIME MINISTERIAL AMBITIONS. THE KELANTAN POLLS ARE
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SEEN AS A BELLWEATHER OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL MOOD
AND THE PREVAILING CONSENSUS IS THAT IF PAS IS DE-
FEATED IN KELANTAN, PRESSURE WILL BE GREAT TO HOLD
NATIONAL ELECTIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THEREAFTER.
END SUMMARY.

2. NOMINATIONS FOR THE 36 KELANTAN STATE LEGISLATIVE

ASSEMBLY SEATS AT STAKE IN THE MARCH 11 STATE ELECTIONS CLOSED FEBRUARY 23 WITH A TOTAL OF 95 CANDIDATES ENTERED IN THE CONTEST. THESE INCLUDE 36 FIELDERD BY THE PAN-MALAYSIAN ISLAMIC PARTY (PMIP OR PAS: ITS MALAY ACRONYM), 25 BY THE NEWLY FORMED BERJASA PARTY, 23 FROM THE NATIONAL FRONT (22 UMNO, 2 MCA), AND 10 INDEPENDENTS. BY CONSTITUENCY, THERE WILL BE 7 FOUR-WAY CONTESTS, 10 THREE-WAY FIGHTS, 11 HEAD-ON CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN PAS AND BERJASA AND 9 DIRECT CONTESTS BETWEEN UMNO AND BETWEEN THE NF AND ITS CHIEF RIVAL, PAS.

3. THE NF AND BERJASA ARE COOPERATING TO THE EXTENT OF AVOIDING HEAD-ON CONTESTS BETWEEN THEIR CANDIDATES AND THERE APPEARS TO BE AN UNDERSTANDING THAT IF THEY SUCCEED IN WRESTING CONTROL OF THE ASSEMBLY FROM PAS THE NEW CHIEF MINISTER WILL COME FROM WHICHEVER OF THE TWO PARTIES GARNERS THE MOST SEATS. IN THIS EVENT IT IS ASSUMED THAT IF BERJASA WINS THE MOST SEATS, IT WILL NAME ITS HEAD, CURRENT CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HAJI MOHAMED NASIR, AS CHIEF MINISTER. IF THE NF WINS A PLURALITY OF THE SEATS, ITS NOMINEE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE DATUK HAJI MOHAMED YAQUB, WHO JUST RESIGNED HIS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POST AS MINISTER OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISES IN ORDER TO RUN IN THE KELANTAN ELECTIONS.

4. OF PARTICULAR INTEREST IS THAT FACT THAT 11 OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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20 PAS MEMBERS OF THE LAST ASSEMBLY WERE NOT RENOMINATED, STRONGLY SUGGESTING THAT THE PARTY IS ANXIOUS TO PRESENT NEW FACES TO THE ELECTORATE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE WIDESPRED CHARGES OF CORRUPTION DURING THE STATE POLITICAL CRISIS LATE LAST YEAR THAT PRECIPITATED THE THREE MONTHS OF EMERGENCY FEDERAL RULE. ON THE OTHER HAND, 13 OF THE 14 FORMER NF MEMBERS OF THE LAST ASSEMBLY WERE RENOMINATED.

5. AT PRESENT, MOST OBSERVERS RATE THE ELECTION AS A TOSS-UP. ALTHOUGH PUBLIC RALLIES HAVE BEEN BANNED, PAS HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF AN ESTABLISHED GRASS-ROOTS INFRASTRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS TEACHERS AND IMAMS THAT IT HAS USED EXTENSIVELY IN PAST CAMPAIGNS. THE NATIONAL FRONT VIA ITS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONNECTIONS HAS ACCESS TO INFORMATION MEDIA PLUS THE PROMISE OF ABILITY TO DELIVER THE GOODS IN A FINANCIAL SENSE. BERJASA, AS A REFORMIST OFFSHOOT OF PAS PROMISES CLEAN GOVERNMENT. THE LATTER TWO ARE LIKELY TO BENEFIT FROM WIDESPREAD DISILLUSIONMENT WITH PAS, WHICH IS STILL UPPERMOST IN THE MINDS OF THE ELECTORATE. IT IS BELIEVED THAT UMNO HAS TIMED THE ELECTIONS CAREFULLY, BEARING

THIS IN MIND, AS A LONGER WAIT WOULD GIVE PAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REBUILD THE SUPPORT IT LOST AFTER THE VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE AGAINST THE KELANTAN CHIEF MINISTER. HOWEVER, SOME OBSERVERS FEEL THAT PUBLIC DISSATISFACTION IS MOST KEENLY DIRECTED AGAINST THE 20 INDIVIDUAL PAS STATE ASSEMBLYMEN, RATHER THAN TO PAS ITSELF, AND THE MANY NEW FACES IN THE PAS LINE-UP MAY MAKE A STRONG SHOWING IF THEY CAN DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM THE "GANG OF 20."

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6. EMBOFFS WHO HAVE RETURNED FROM RECENT TRAVELS IN EAST COAST STATES OF KELANTAN, TRENGGANU AND PAHANG AS WELL AS THE WEST COAST STATE OF KEDAH REPORT GENERAL CONSENSUS AMONG POLITICAL OBSERVERS THAT IF THE NF AND BERJASA WIN CONTROL OF KELANTAN, PRESSURE WILL BE GREAT TO HOLD NATIONAL ELECTIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. MOST AGREE THAT THERE WILL BE A DEFINITE SPILL-OVER EFFECT FROM THE KELANTAN ELECTIONS, PARTICULARLY IN OTHER STATES WHERE PAS AND UMNO ARE THE CHIEF CONTENDERS (KEDAH, TRENGGANU, PERLIS).

7. MEANWHILE, NUMEROUS NF LUMINAR-IES, INCLUDING KELANTAN NATIVES TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH (FEDERAL FINANCE MINISTER) AND FOREIGN MINISTER

TENGKU AHMAD RITHAUDDEEN, HAVE VISITED KELANTAN IN PAST FEW DAYS TO ASSIST IN POLITICKING. RAZALEIGH, WHO EARLIER HAD DECLARED THE NF'S OBJECTIVE IS TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DESTROY PAS, REPORTEDLY TOLD REPORTERS IN KELANTAN FEBRUARY 23 THAT THE STATE ELECTIONS THERE WOULD NOT ONLY DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF PAS BUT ALSO HIS OWN.

8. MOOD IN IMPORTANT STATE OF KEDAH, HOME BASE FOR A NUMBER OF PROMINENT UMNO PERSONALITIES SUCH AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMED, UMNO SECRETARY GENERAL DATUK SENU ABDUL RAHMAN, AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. KHIR JOHARI, IS ONE OF UNCERTAINTY. ALTHOUGH THE STATE HAS BEEN AFFLICTED BY A LENGTHY DROUGHT THAT HAS FORCED CANCELLATION OF THE OFF-SEASON RICE CROP IN DOUBLE-CROPPING AREAS OF THE MUDA IRRIGATION SCHEME, THIS SEEMS TO BE OF LESS CONCERN TO NATIONAL FRONT LEADERS THAN THE UNCERTAINTY OF HAVING TO FACE ONCE AGAIN THE OFTEN RUTHLESS CAMPAIGN TACTICS PRACTISED BY PAS (UMNO AND PAS LAST COMPETED IN THE 1969 NATIONAL ELECTIONS). ONE THOUGHTFUL STATE UMNO LEADER TOLD US THAT HE AND A NUMBER OF HIS COLLEAGUES FAVORED NATIONAL ELECTIONS AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE TIME AND WHILE PAS WAS STILL CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL FRONT (WHICH WOULD CIRCUMSCRIBE ITS ABILITY TO ATTACK THE NF).

9. COMMENT: THE KELANTAN POLLS ARE IMPORTANT NOT ONLY AS A BELLWEATHER FOR THE NATIONAL POLITICAL MOOD BUT ALSO FOR THE HIGH INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL STAKES INVOLVED. TENGKU RAZALEIGH SEEMS TO BE CALLING MANY OF THE SHOTS, LEADING SOME OF HIS DETRACTORS TO SAY HE IS PUTTING HIS INTERESTS ABOVE THOSE OF THE PARTY. HOWEVER, THE UNDOUBTEDLY NEEDS A SECURE POWER BASE AND THE ABILITY TO DELIVER AT LEAST ONE STATE TO THE UMNO FOLD IN ORDER TO VIE AT SOME FUTURE DATE FOR THE PREMIERSHIP. (FYI: RAZALEIGH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IS NOT HIMSELF CONTESTING IN THE STATE ELECTIONS. END FYI). MILLER

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